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Title : Need to exempt the hill Tea Gardens of Darjeeling from paying Water Cess.

SHRI D. NARBULA (DARJEELING): Darjeeling is famous for three "Ts" i.e. Tea, Tourism and Timber. Of the three, tea is the most important as the economy of Darjeeling mostly depend on tea. The tea of Darjeeling is famous throughout the World. Presently the production of tea in North Bengal has caused an alarming situation. The increase in the cost of production is one of the main reasons. The present situation of tea industry in Darjeeling is also getting worse day by day. This has caused an anxiety not only in Darjeeling but also to our country as it will affect the export of tea as most of the tea produced in Darjeeling is exported to different countries.

Considering the problem, the Government should give certain facilities in production of tea. Previously the tea gardens in Darjeeling were exempted from paying water cess as tea gardens in Darjeeling do not come under municipality or notified area. Now, however, the Pollution Control Board of West Bengal, in order to raise funds, has levied a sum of Rs.5000/- (five thousand) per tea estate before the tea garden factory licenses are renewed.

The conditions of tea gardens situated in Darjeeling Hill are different from the other tea gardens of the plains. There is acute shortage of water in the hills. The management is to harvest rainwater and spring water by generating their own resources. The Government or the administration do not help the tea garden management in mitigating this hardship.

I, therefore, urge upon the Government to modify the notification NO. 499(E) dated 6th May, 2003 of the Ministry of Environment and Forest and exempt the hill tea gardens of Darjeeling from paying water cess.